

LANDOWNERS



LEGISLATIVE • ALERT

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SOME READERS may not be aware that Alabama's TREASURE Forest Program, started in 1974, served as the blueprint for the nation's forest landowner technical assistance program, the Forest Stewardship Program. Where the TREASURE Forest Program is sponsored by the Alabama Forestry Planning Committee with administrative responsibilities carried out by the Alabama Forestry Commission, the Forest Stewardship program is carried out by the state forestry agencies with financial and technical assistance from the USDA-Forest Service.

The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP), brought to life through the 1990 Farm Bill, helps private forest landowners to develop long-term plans for their forests at little to no cost that take into account water quality, wildlife habitat, and wood production goals. And when available, cost-share assistance can be provided through the Stewardship Incentives Program (SIP) or the Forest Incentives Program (FIP) to help implement those goals. Over 130,000 plans are currently in place, covering 16.5 million acres of forestlands.

Forest Landowner Assistance in Context

A recent study has shed light on the value and effectiveness of the FSP and puts the TREASURE Forest Program in similar context. The Northern Illinois University's Center for Governmental Studies released a study in February of this year showing that the FSP is reaching new forest landowners who are implementing their forest management plans and investing in their forests as a result of the program.

The study, conducted by Dr. J. Dixon Esseks from Northern Illinois University

and Robert J. Moulton, an economist with the USDA-Forest Service, showed that 92 percent of those surveyed who enrolled in the FSP said they were still actively involved in implementing their Forest Stewardship Plans. Two thirds said that prior to their involvement with the FSP, they had had no previous professional land management assistance. Results such as this prove the value and importance of forest landowner assistance programs in encouraging good forest stewardship.

"This study confirms what we've seen in the field," said Stan Adams, North Carolina state forester and president of the National Association of State Foresters. "The FSP is reaching out to a large segment of the forest landowning public and getting them to take an active interest in managing their forests. With thousands of people acquiring forestland every day, this outreach effort must be redoubled to ensure that these private forests are managed well for their current owners and for future generations."

Survey participants also indicated that getting involved in the Forest Stewardship program had prompted them to make investments in forest management. Nationwide, survey respondents said they had invested an average of \$2,764 to implement their Stewardship plans. Ninety-four percent of those surveyed said they would recommend the FSP to friends or family.

"This study shows that once landowners get some professional help in managing their lands, they come to understand the value of that assistance and they understand the value of forest management," Adams said. "We also found that landowners sometimes need financial help to implement needed practices. We're looking at options at both the state

and national level to provide those financial incentives."

The study further revealed that landowners were nearly three times as likely to start implementing their forest management plan and twice as likely to implement more than one plan objective when cost-share assistance money is available.

Over 9 million non-industrial private forest landowners own almost two thirds of the nation's forestlands. These lands produce more than half the wood fiber harvested in the United States annually.

There are more forest landowners than farmers in the United States, and the value of the timber crop alone delivered to mills is higher than the value of any single row crop like wheat, corn, or barley.

Stewardship Appropriations

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) has been utilizing the FSP study as justification and rationale to show the effectiveness and value of programs that help forest landowners accomplish their management goals. The implementation of management plans produce public goods beyond the goals of each individual landowner such as clean air, clean water, scenic vistas and improved wildlife habitat. Assisting the private landowner with proper forest stewardship more than justifies the expenditure of federal dollars on private lands and the study helps show this.

It appears that members of Congress agree that the FSP is a valuable tool to assist the private landowner and the general public. Preliminary numbers for fiscal year 2001 show a \$2 million increase for the nationwide program, bringing the funding total to \$31.454 million.

Unfortunately, the value of forest cost-share programs does not appear to have sunk in as much. Initial indications show that the Stewardship Incentives Program and the Forest Incentives Program will both be funded at last year's level, a disappointing goose egg for SIP and a flat \$6.325 million for FIP.

The state foresters have been supporting the FSP and FIP at levels of \$36.5 million and \$25 million respectively and are currently in the process of developing a new cost-share program that will hopefully garner new support and replace the

Continued on page 27

such as the 'Pond Loblollies,' 'Pond Sunflower Field,' and 'Pond Hardwoods.' Then I went back and entered the details on each stand. For example, I recorded when I planted the pines along the road to the cabin when it was just a path." Placing features on a map is easy with FARMS® because users can either approximate the locations of boundaries, groves, roads, etc., or import exact coordinates from a Global Positioning System (GPS).

Dr. Parker doesn't consider himself computer savvy, but he found the FARMS® software easy to use and caught on quickly. "With the hectic schedule of a veterinary practice, I don't have a lot of time, and it probably took me a total of three weeks to enter all the basic information on my property."

As the diversity of his TREASURE Forest increased, FARMS® enabled him to keep up with everything that was going on. Dr. Parker says, "With all of the little fields to keep up with, it's perfect. I know when, where, and what I planted so that I can track growth rates. For example, this year I planted 300 chestnut trees and intend to plant a California white oak later. Every note is documented. I even used FARMS® to locate sandy sites where I planted longleaf pines."

In addition to managing timber, Dr. Parker uses his computer to monitor wildlife on his property. A participant in the Department of Conservation's Deer Management Program, Dr. Parker monitors food plots and harvesting. "I record my tree stands and the animals harvested each season. I've mapped where I've planted Alfa Graze and Alfa Rack feeding plots for deer, chufas for turkey, and les-pedeza for quail." FARMS® allows Dr. Parker to see these areas and determine where the deer are feeding. Comparing harvesting information from one season to another shows Dr. Parker how his deer population is prospering in terms of body weight, age class and buck-to-doe ratios.


Property Used to Educate Others

Dr. Parker's property is such a diverse landscape that it is often used for educational purposes. "Adults and students in grade school should have a place where they can learn about trees, see differences in growth rates and generally enjoy the outdoors," says Dr. Parker. One of his long-term goals for the property is filling the educational needs of future generations.

Alabama TREASURE Forest Association members have toured his


property in the past. Currently, Dr. Parker is preparing to host his largest tour ever, 400 to 500 statewide visitors participating in the October Landowner and TREASURE Forest Conference. The visitors will see first hand the TREASURE Forest Dr. Parker has created. Using FARMS®, Dr. Parker plans to provide each visitor with a map of his property that identifies the important features along the tour route.

As a member of the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association and president of the Elmore County chapter, Dr. Parker is among the private forest landowners who own 95 percent of Alabama's forests. "I could sit down and spend my time watching television," recognizes Dr. Parker, "but I would rather spend that time working out here and at the end of the day I will have all this to show for it."

The Elmore County Chapter of the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association can be reached at (334) 567-6301. More information or a free demonstration copy of the FARMS® software can be acquired by: calling NRT at (334) 252-0744 or toll free at 888-848-2146; by writing to NRT at P.O. Box 780603, Tallahassee, Alabama 36078-0603; or by visiting the NRT web site at www.nrtech.com. 

Landowners Continued from page 7

zero-funded SIP. As of publication date, Congress is still deliberating the final numbers.

The NASF represents the directors of the state forestry agencies from all 50 states, eight U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. The member agencies help deliver the Forest Stewardship Program and provide other management and technical assistance to private landowners as well. Further information about the state foresters and the landowner assistance programs that they support can be found on the web (www.stateforesters.org). The Forest Stewardship Program study can also be found in its entirety on the web (www.rtp.srs.fs.fed.us/econ/pubs/jde001.htm). 

Forestry Commission Web Page:
www.forestry.state.al.us

Travelog Continued from page 9

Alabama's Seaport

Another leading player in the movement of forest products abroad is the Alabama State Docks. In 1999, this state-owned operation led all other U.S. ports in the shipment of forest products and it handled more forest products than any other type of cargo through its terminals. Significant investments in forest product terminals, warehouse facilities, and the location of key shippers in the U.S. Southeast led to the dominant position of the state docks in this sector.

Outlook

Expect exports to make an even bigger impact on Alabama's forest product industry and our state docks. The reasons are simple. Over 95 percent of the world's population is outside of the United States. Consumers worldwide pre-

fer products made from natural wood for the home and office. Increasingly, they want to know that the products originate from renewable forests.

There's no better place to shop than Alabama. It's in the middle of one of the great wood baskets of the world, where foreign buyers continue to discover one of our best kept secrets—ownership of Alabama's timberlands is in private hands.

Alabama's forest landowners are a critical, first link to these worldwide consumers. As foreign markets for Alabama-made wood products grow, so will the trees. For the foreign buyer and the Alabama supplier, having a long term, reliable source of supply is the foundation for export success.

The next time a newspaper article touts the volume of autos exported from Alabama, remember that you may have a piece of one of the biggest export industries growing right in your own forest. 